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MONT BLANC.



CLIMBING A WALL OF ICE.

On the morning of a lovely day in August, in the year 18—, two travellers were seen to enter an Alpine village, &c. &c.

This is the usual way of beginning a romantic description. At this present writing, however, we are not particularly inclined

to indulge in high-flown phrases, even about Mont Blanc. For Albert Smith and the other modern travellers treat the ascent of this great mountain as such a very ordinary affair—simply a matter of ropes, guides, good spirits, and determined perseverance—that for stay-at-home travellers to get up any sort of enthusiasm about the matter is rather ridiculous.

The mere fact, however, of a man not having seen a particular place is no reason whatever why he should not write a charming description of it. And, in truth, the *not* having seen Mont Blanc, for instance, would be rather an advantage to a writer than otherwise, as he could draw upon his imagination and poetical temperament without danger of encountering that shock to his feelings, that strange sense of disappointment, which almost invariably attends the first sight of any grand natural phenomenon. Not having witnessed the real dangers of the ascent, and being quite unconscious of the icy coldness which benumbs alike the senses and the imagination, he could rhapsodise at his ease about “everlasting clouds” and “mighty hills so shadowy and sublime;” and, looking at the Alps from the home point of view, it would be easy to indulge in a proper degree of enthusiasm concerning those

“——— palaces of nature, whose vast walls
Have pinned in clouds their snowy scalps,
And enthroned eternity in icy halls
Of cold sublimity.”

And more than this, being in no way liable to the slightest inconvenience by reason of any awkward avalanche overhead, or any yawning chasm at his feet, and being in no fear of speaking loud or laughing—

“Lest a word or breath
Bring down a winter's snow,”

he can take his own time in looking at the mighty scene; and using imagination's spectacles, need undergo no trouble in passing over the snow bridge at the “Grand Mulets,” or even in climbing the great cone itself.

In the present instance, however, we are spared all trouble in the matter of reminiscence; for we have lying before us the second monthly part of one of the most complete and beautifully illustrated works ever devoted to the subjects of mountains and valleys.* In its pages are collected accounts of the most celebrated ascents of Mont Blanc—from that of Saussure in 1785, to the daring expedition of Albert Smith and his friends in 1851. In this splendid work the editor has been at considerable pains to bring together all the best information on the subject of the interesting countries traversed by the Alps. We, sitting at our ease, will accompany a party of adventurers up the sides of the famous mountain. We start from the Valley of Chamouni. The last human habitation which the traveller sees is the Châlet de la Para, about an hour and half's journey from the Village des Pêlerins. At the north-eastern extremity of the valley there rises the lofty green passage of the Col de Balme; then come the red, craggy, thunder-smitten pinnacles of the Aiguilles Rouges; then, directly opposite, the long fir-woods, and bare broken summit of the Brévent, and turning a little round, the bold calcareous turrets of the Aiguille de Varens, partly covered by a low mass of white cloud. Then come the green hills closing the other end of the Valley of Chamouni.

Looking directly downwards, just under the feet, are seen the dark pine-woods at the base of the mountain, intersected by the white stony torrent that has burst for itself several channels to form the Arve. Then, further on, numerous brown chalets, dispersed irregularly among the parallelograms of yellow corn, green hemp, flax, or clover. A little further appears the clustered village of Chamouni, and the light tin covered spire of the church. Turning the back on the village, and rising a little from the valley, there is a long line of tall, thick, dark-green pines, forming a most beautiful back-ground to the white icy pinnacles of the rugged Glacier des Bossons, which projects far down into the smiling valley beneath. Then,

higher up above, is the Aiguille du Goûté, and the huge bulk of the Dome du Goûté, shining like polished silver in the morning sun; and still higher, and directly over head, the snowy pinnacles of the stupendous Aiguille du Midi; its base covered with ice, and lower down with moss, heath, juniper, rhododendrons, and other plants.

At the Châlet de la Para the vegetation diminishes, and, at length, the fir-trees disappear. Before this, provision is made for the evening meal, by wood being picked up, and sometimes chopped into a convenient size and shape. This fuel is then tied on to the knapsacks of the guides. “I was apprehensive,” says Mr. Browne, “of some accident to men thus heavily laden, and presently, as we were scaling a most awkward block of ice, down went Favret, load and all, into the *crevasse*, and but for his long protruding faggots of wood, which stuck on either side of the *crevasse*, he would have gone to a great depth.”

Should the adventurers proceed on mules thus far, they are dismissed as soon as a sort of stone tent is reached, which is formed on one side of a vast block, and on the other of a wall of uncemented pieces. The mouth is open, but within the visitor is tolerably snug, especially in the anticipation of the fatigue and discomfort about to be encountered. In this rude refuge the solitary goat-herd and part of his flock find occasional shelter from the biting blast, which, at such elevations, is frequently experienced, and from the still greater violence of the pelting storm.

Soon after leaving this spot, the course is continued by a narrow foot-way, or ledge, in the face of the cliff, in some places perpendicular, and in others overhanging the abysses below. This track, partly natural, is, in some places, improved by the people of the valley; and a tolerably accurate idea of it may be formed by imagining, that against a precipice of some hundred feet in height, a wall of two feet thick was built about half way up, and the path consists entirely of the space on the top of the wall, which is frequently so narrow as to compel the adventurers to advance sideways with their faces towards the rock, because the ordinary breadth of a man's shoulders would throw the balance of his person over the edge of the precipice.

The travellers have but commenced their journey. The Glacier des Bossons reached, their further progress seems stopped by a precipitous tower of ice. But this surmounted, by means of a staircase of notches cut by the hatchets of the guides, a chasm of uncertain depth has to be crossed, and the onward journey lies over ice ridges, slender arches suspended over dark abysses, and huge blocks of ice which appear mountains of themselves. The adventurous party, tied together with ropes, and preceded by careful guides, arrive at length by painful steps at the edge of the glacier. Snow mountains and ice hills, *crevasses* numerous and deep, solid walls of ice, and ugly fissures, bar their passage to the Grand Mulets. But even this is reached at last, and they prepare to spend the night on granite rocks 11,000 feet above the level of the sea.

The Grand Mulets consist of a narrow chain of rocks, which derive their name from a fancied resemblance of their aspect, as seen from the valley, to a team of mules; but all images fail to exhibit the awful contrast of their dark isolated range of pinnacles with the dazzling fields of ice and snow above, around, and beneath them.

Mont Blanc is still 5,000 feet above them. The view from this spot is, however, of no ordinary beauty and magnificence. The panorama, heightened by the deep azure of the sky, and the clearness of the atmosphere, embraces within its mighty grasp, mountains than which none are more sublime—masses of ice and snow of surpassing grandeur—valleys smiling with verdure, lit up, perhaps, by the rays of the sun,—Leman, all placidity, appearing like a lake of molten silver—and the blue hills of Jura, “far, far away.” Mont Blanc, the most prominent feature of this august scene,—

* “The Alps, Switzerland, Savoy, and Lombardy.” By the Rev. Charles Williams. In Monthly parts at Twenty-five Cents.

“High o'er the rest, displays superior state,
In grand pre-eminence supremely great.”

Here they pass the night; and early in the morning the travellers recommence their toilsome and dangerous journey. Again are the awful ice-hills and treacherous snow-drifts to be dared; again dark chasms, which may not be looked into by nervous heads, are crossed with careful steps; again, fastened one to another, dangerous, ice-formed, slippery-looking bridges, are ventured on by the daring company; again are strength of character and determination put to the test, and the Grand Plateau is gained.

Above are the Rochers Rouges, or Red Rocks, at the foot of which lay the old route to the summit, prior to the ascent of Messrs Fellowes and Hawes in the year 1827. The really hazardous part of the journey commences here. Avalanches and crevasses are equally to be avoided. The Dernier Rochers, the highest visible rocks are above them; below appear a vast assemblage of white pyramids—Monte Rosa, the Col du Géant, and the snow-clad rocks reaching down to the Mer de Glace.

"Snow piled on snow; each mass appears
The gathered winter of a thousand years."

The travellers, drawing near the summit, experience the effect on the frame of so great an elevation. Some parts of their bodies become very dry, a livid colour and constriction of the skin begin to be observed, the thirst is intense, and can scarcely be allayed, even by continually eating sugar, French plums, and snow. In a narrow valley, sheltered from the wind, and exposed to the sun's direct rays,—the common focus, too, of rays reflected from vast surrounding walls of snow,—the heat is oppressive, and the face becomes scorched. A veil is, therefore, put on, and green spectacles are used, which are indispensable to obviate the glare from the sun.

Greater sufferings still follow; every two or three minutes they all sink down on the snow, absolutely breathless, and scarcely able to utter a word. In so rarified an atmosphere, they cannot hear one another speak, even at a short distance, without great exertion, and then the voice sounds thin and remote, like a bell in the half-exhausted receiver on the plate of an air pump. "I should no more have thought," says Mr. Auldjo, "of calling to a guide fifty yards from me, than a man on Ben Lomond would do to a friend on the opposite summit of the Cöbler." One of the guides has an hæmorrhage from an accidental blow, and the blood appears of an unusually dark colour. The lips of the party are quite blue, their faces extremely contracted and pale, and the eyes very much sunk, with a deep dark zone beneath the lower eyelids. Every moment, a longing look is cast towards the summit, and then, holding their heads low, they press onwards, some with overwhelming headache and various other pains, till the feeling of exhaustion becomes irresistible, and they sink again quite flat and still upon the snow.

Another effort, and success must be achieved. The Côte is yet above them. "I had the greatest difficulty," says Albert Smith, "in getting my wandering wits into order, but the risk called for the strongest mental effort, and with just sense enough to see that our success in scaling this awful precipice was entirely dependent upon 'pluck,' I got ready for the climb. The Mer de la Côte is some hundred feet high, and is an all but perpendicular iceberg. At one point you can reach it from the snow, but immediately after you begin to ascend it obliquely there is nothing below but a chasm in the ice, more frightful than anything yet passed. Of course every footstep had to be cut with the adzes; and my blood ran cooler still, as I saw the first guides creeping like flies upon its smooth glistening surface. The two Tairraz were in front of me, with the fore part of the rope, and François Cachat, I think, behind. For upwards of half an hour we kept on slowly mounting this iceberg, until we reached the foot of the last ascent,—the *calotte*, as it is called,—the 'cap,' of Mont Blanc. The danger was now over, but not the labour, for this dome of ice was difficult to mount. The axe was again in requisition, and everybody was so 'blown,' in common parlance, that we had to stop every three or four minutes. My young companions kept bravely on, like fine fellows as they were, getting ahead even of some of the guides: but I

was perfectly done up. Honest Tairraz had no sinécure to pull me after him, for I was stumbling about as though completely intoxicated. I could not keep my eyes open, and planted my feet anywhere but in the right place. I know I was exceedingly cross. I have even a recollection of having scolded my 'team' because they did not go quicker; and I was excessively indignant when one of them dared to call my attention to Monte Rosa. At last one or two went in front, and thus somewhat quickened our progress. Gradually our speed increased, until I was scrambling almost on my hands and knees, and then, as I found myself on a level, it suddenly stopped. I looked round, and saw there was nothing higher. The batons were stuck in the snow, and the guides were grouped about, some lying down, and others standing in little parties. I was on the top of Mont Blanc!"

HOPE ON.

BY DOUGALL CHRISTIE.

If ever Fortune's sunny face
Hath smiled upon thee for a space,
But frowned when clouds began their race,
Look not back!

If ever Joy's soul-cheering smile
Hath lighted up thy fate awhile,
But gloomed at last with treacherous guile,
Look not back!

If ever Happiness' pure ray
Hath glinted on thy opening day,
But sorrow tinged thy noon with grey,
Look not back!

If ever dreams of well-won fame,
To weave a garland round thy name,
Should wake in woe but not in shame,
Look not back!

Oh! look not back with fruitless pain
Nor hug remembrance' torturing chain;
What's done is done, and must remain,
Then look not back!

Stoop not to profitless despair,
But hope; the haggard cheek of care
May yet a smile of comfort wear,
Forward look!

Trust to the Fount of peace and power
To soothe the miseries of the hour;
Man's help is but a withered flower—
Trust in God!

ANCIENT MITRE AND CHASUBLE.

THIS mitre, formerly preserved in the Museum of Reims, belonged, if report speak true, to the Cardinal of Lorraine, Charles of Guise, and was worn by him at the Council of Trent. In 1669, the value of the mitre was estimated at 45,000 livres, a sum equal to £2,500. The stones were mounted on silver cloth, covered with gold flagree; the highest point of the front of the mitre being formed by a figure of Saint Michael, the archangel, destroying the dragon. This was originally ornamented with seventeen small diamonds, valued at sixty crowns. A fine turquoise and two rubies, immediately under the image of the saint, were estimated at 400 livres. On the frontal band, the title of Jesus, in Gothic letters, was formed of diamonds. Two emeralds, engraved, one with an image of the Virgin, and the other with an image of the angel Gabriel, were also in this frontal band, which, besides, was decorated with rubies. Pearls, rubies, and emeralds, formed the edging to the mitre, and the exquisite flagree work was jewelled here and there with precious stones. The centre band of the mitre was peculiarly rich in jewels, and the pendants were formed of cloth of gold.

This beautiful mitre was hidden during the French Revolution, together with some other valuable property presented to Louis XIV., in a secret chamber in the Museum of Reims. There they were supposed to be perfectly secure; but when